

Session 2 – David, Goliath, Saul and Jonathan (Champions, enemies and friends)

It's not unusual to find people in everyday life describing themselves as being in a David and Goliath struggle with somebody. We delight in the underdog overcoming the favourite, the minnow outwitting the big fish, the victim standing up against the bully. But our British love for the underdog too easily clouds our understanding of what made David so successful against Goliath and what the author of 1 Samuel intends us to learn from it.

1 Sam 17:1-3 the Israelite and Philistine armies lined up against each other either side of a valley. Neither army wanted to abandon the advantage of higher ground. It seemed like stalemate.

1 Samuel 17:4-11 – the role of a champion, Goliath's height and armour, his defiant shout

The use of champions was supposedly to resolve conflicts without large-scale warfare. Found in epic poetry and myths of ancient and medieval periods (e.g. Achilles and Hector in Homer's *Iliad*). Notable real historical examples:

- Battle of the 300 Champions (Greece, 546 BC) between Sparta and Argos
- Battle of the Clans (Scotland, 1396 AD) 30 men each from Clan Kay and Clan Chattan

The benefit of a champion was the people didn't need to fight. A champion fought on their behalf.

Relevance for us: *There's a powerful spiritual point to this when you consider seeing Jesus as our champion. He goes into battle against the forces of evil, so that we do not need to. Rather than just seeing Jesus as our teacher, example or leader, which still leaves us having to do all the heavy lifting, seeing him as our champion frees us from this onerous burden. And when our champion wins, it leads us to joy and celebration.*

Goliath was no ordinary soldier. His height of ~3 metres / 9ft 9 ins is probably not an exaggeration. See references in OT to giants in the promised land (Num 13 - Nephilim, the descendants of Anak. See Gen 6:4. Also known as Anakim, Rephaites or Rephaim in Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Job and Psalms. More significantly, they were people who specifically opposed God and His ways. But remember God told Samuel not to be impressed with someone's appearance or height (ch16)

Take note of Goliath's challenge (v10); 'This day I defy the armies of Israel. Give me a man and let us fight each other.'

17:25-37 David's response

v26 'Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God.'

This is the first thing we've heard David say since we first met him. Now, David injected a much-needed heavenly perspective into a situation that otherwise seemed desperate.

The Israelite soldiers saw Goliath as someone clearly bigger and more powerful than any of them, who was defying their nation of Israel and making their lives a misery.

David on the other hand saw Goliath as defying not just Israel but the living God. He was not prepared to let someone get away with brazenly challenging the authority and power of God.

David believed the living God was far more powerful than Goliath and the Philistine gods. He saw the likely outcome of an encounter with Goliath much more positively (v36 and again in 45-47).

Relevance for us: *Are we the same? What is our reaction when we hear someone pour scorn on the Church? Are we more stirred up about the insult to us than about the insult to God? Does what people think of us matter more to us than what they think of God?*

The honour of God mattered deeply to David. He didn't think people should be allowed to get away with insulting God. But he also believed God would not let people get away with it.

That was what gave him the confidence to go into battle with Goliath. Look at his declaration in v36-37. It was not David's courage or skill that saved him from the lion and the bear when he was guarding the sheep, it was God who delivered him. And the same God would do it again when he went up against Goliath.

17:41-50 What Goliath saw and what David saw

When Goliath looked at David all he saw was a young boy, glowing with health, handsome and carrying a stick. He saw David as a totally inadequate opponent for someone as powerful as him.

What David saw was someone who had 'defied' (the word occurs 6x in this chapter) the God of the armies of Israel. He saw Goliath as deserving judgment for such arrogance and rebellion against God. He was totally confident God would deliver the Philistine into his hands – so that (v46) not just David, but the whole world would know that there was a God in Israel.

17:45-47 What God uses to achieve His purposes

Goliath relied on the things our world considers strengths, but that is not how God wins. He uses what our world would consider weakness to show that he is God Almighty.

Relevance for us: *In a world where political and business leaders use their apparent strengths to seek to dominate others they consider weaker, and we feel inadequate to do anything about it, we'd do well to remember the God we profess to follow and trust.*

18:1-20:43 Saul becomes the enemy

David's victory over Goliath produced different reactions in different people.

As we can see in the next few chapters, whatever relief Saul might have felt at seeing off the Philistines soon gave way to suspicion and jealousy of David.

When Saul heard what the women were singing about David (18:6-9), 'This saying displeased him' (literally) 'This thing was bad *in his eyes*'. Continuing theme of what Saul saw. From then on 'Saul was *watching* David with crookedness' (*avon* - sin)

At first, Saul's intentions didn't appear to be murderous, and it is not until the start of chapter 19 that David was overtly warned by Jonathan that his father wanted David dead. However, we are made aware of the true nature of Saul's feelings halfway through ch18 (v12-17).

Saul's way of dealing with David was to offer his daughter Merab in marriage to him. Which he was due anyway (see 17:25). But the price was that David had to remain a soldier. Saul hoped the Philistines would one day succeed in killing David, saving him the trouble (18:17b).

The marriage offer could've indicated God was opening the door to David becoming king. But he refused to see it that way (v18). God had promised him the throne, and he would only take up that position when God made it clear Saul's time was over (a theme repeated in the next 12 chapters).

Saul may have taken David's response as saying that David couldn't afford the bride price. When Saul discovered his younger daughter Michal was in love with David and so offered her instead, David demurred again, on the basis that he was 'a poor man and little known' (v23),

So Saul cannily set the bride price at the foreskins of 100 dead Philistines (v25), thinking David couldn't resist the temptation to prove his success in fighting. Which was true (v27). Was this the first hint of a weakness in David? Did he relish the challenge of defeating God's enemies so much that he risked jumping in without looking first to God for wisdom on the right thing to do?

The reason for David's success was that the LORD was with him (v28). God was protecting him even when (or especially when) David wasn't aware of how much danger he was in. God had chosen David as the future king and nothing would be allowed to alter that plan.

Relevance for us: *Is this why many of the characters in the Bible still experienced God's blessing even when they did things that are sinful? Think of Moses killing an Egyptian in a moment of anger (Ex 2:11-14). Or Abraham lying about his relationship with Sarah when he felt his life was in danger (Gen 12:1-20 & again 20:1-17). Or when David committed adultery (2 Sam 11). We may wonder why we bother trying to live a holy life when God still blesses people who fail so spectacularly. But we would do well to remember two things:*

1. *God always has a much bigger picture in mind than we do. He's working out His purposes and freely chooses the people through whom He will do that. Their failings as*

human beings are not going to get in the way. We may wonder how God can continue to bless the ministry of Christian leaders when they have serious moral faults that only become obvious over the course of time, but that is God's choice.

2. *We should take heart that God doesn't drop people the moment they let Him down. Because, even if we think we've lived a more godly life than some more prominent people in the history of the Church, we too will probably let God down many times. We should be deeply grateful that God doesn't immediately cast us out and choose to work through someone else but comes to meet us in His Son and call us to repentance and renewed faith. He gives us a second chance, and a third, and a fourth.*

So, let's be grateful that God does not deal with us the way we might deal with others.

18:1-4 David and Jonathan – a deep and lasting friendship

So, David had slain Israel's greatest enemy, the Philistine Goliath, only for Saul, the king of Israel, to become his personal enemy and the greatest threat to his life. But the slaying of Goliath also resulted in the growth of David's greatest friendship.

Saul's eldest son, Jonathan, became one in spirit with David and he loved him as himself (cf. Lev 19:18)

There are highly significant words in these verses.

Firstly, Jonathan made a 'covenant' (a binding agreement) with David. We find many covenants mentioned in the Bible and they're not all the same.

One-way covenants: e.g. the one made after the flood with Noah, his sons and every living creature with them (Gen 9:12). Initiated by God. He alone made any promises. There were no conditions to be complied with for the promises to be fulfilled. Other one-way covenants were made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Two-way covenants: e.g. the one made between God and the Israelites at Mount Sinai. Initiated by God. He made promises to be with them and be their God. Fulfilment of the promises was conditional upon the Israelites obeying commandments about how they lived, how they related to Him and to each other. Note the conditions were set by God alone. There was no negotiation.

The covenant between Jonathan and David was different again. A two-way covenant. Initiated by Jonathan. But both parties made promises and stated their firm commitment to one another.

To mark that commitment Jonathan took off his robe, and his tunic and even his sword, bow and belt and gave them to David. In that culture, clothes were an indicator of a person's status. By handing his clothes and weapons to David, Jonathan was effectively renouncing his position as the king-in-waiting and committing himself to the man God had chosen to take Jonathan's place. That must have taken a lot of love and humility on Jonathan's part.

At that time, in that part of the world, any other prince would have got rid of any threat to their succession. That's why Saul was angry with Jonathan for supporting David (20:20-31).

Likewise John the Baptist surrendered his position as someone people flocked to see and instead encouraged his disciples to follow Jesus. 'He must increase and I must decrease.' (John 3:30). And Jesus surrendered his place at His Father's side, to 'empty himself' (Phil 2:7) in order that we might be saved. And Paul considered everything about his past, his status and achievements as 'a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ' (Phil 3:8).

Relevance for us: *Are we prepared to surrender whatever we might consider to be our rights or our status among our friends and family in order for others to flourish and so that God might get the glory?*

Jonathan would find himself having to choose between his commitment to David and his loyalty to his own father. Every time he chose to side with David, even though David was the reason Jonathan would never himself be king.

Jonathan went behind his father's back to warn David when he was in particular danger from Saul's anger (19:1-3). He also spoke up for David in front of Saul (19:4-7) which put Jonathan at considerable risk of antagonising his father further.

Jonathan was well aware that, once David did become king, he might do what many other usurpers of the throne would do in those days and arrange for all of Saul's family to be wiped out. So, he urged David to reaffirm their oath of friendship and commitment to one another (20:12-17).

Jonathan appeared again at a critical moment when David had been on the run from Saul for some time and had been betrayed by others. He somehow found David's hiding place in the wilderness and came to encourage him (1 Sam 23:15-18). Still today God comes to meet us and encourage us when we're feeling most abandoned and hard-pressed

Relevance to us: *The Jonathan-David saga is a powerful picture of the depth of commitment God calls us into, first of all with Himself, but also with other members of His family. It is because God has covenanted with us that we, from that position of being sure of God's love for us, are able to offer that same love to others, regardless of how that love is received.*

We could do with encouraging more of that sort of mutual commitment within the Christian family. To covenant/bind ourselves to one another under God, to be there for each other.

Some people have sought to make out that the relationship between Jonathan and David must have been a homosexual one because of the statements of their deep love for each other. But that is to impose modern values and views of sexuality on a 3,000-year-old friendship. And it is a sad reflection of the degree to which our approach to and expectation of deep, meaningful, non-sexual friendships has been seriously weakened over the past 100 years.